

Colby Library Quarterly



May 1947

SERIES ONE OF THE COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY

was published in the four-year period 1943 to 1946

in January, March, June, and October by the Colby College Library at Waterville, Maine, under the editorship of Carl J. Weber, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts. Subscription price: two dollars a year. Current single numbers: fifty cents. A printed INDEX to Series One will be supplied free upon request to any subscriber to this QUARTERLY.

Copies of all previous issues are still available. For convenience of reference, these issues may be identified as follows: in 1943, the Tennyson Jubilee issue appeared in January; the Newton Tercentenary number in March; the Henry James Centenary issue in June; and the Noah Webster Centenary, in October; in 1944, we observed the Henry C. Carey Sesquicentennial in January; a Kelmscott Press Jubilee in March; the Alexander Pope Bicentenary in June, and issued a "D-Day Number" in October; in 1945, our issues were devoted, in January to the fiftieth anniversary of Robert Louis Stevenson's death; in March, to Letters of William James; in June, to the Tenth Anniversary of the Colby Library Associates; and in October to the Swift Bicentenary; and in 1946, we observed, in January, the 50th Anniversary of *Jude the Obscure*; in March, the Jubilee of *A Shropshire Lad*; in June appeared our Smollett's *Ode* issue; and in October a William Morris Jubilee issue.

Beginning with the year 1947 this QUARTERLY will appear in February, May, August, and November—a timing which will correct the irregularities of our schedule during the first four years of our history. With the issue for February 1947, we began Series II.

Communications regarding subscriptions should be addressed to the Librarian; communications regarding articles in the QUARTERLY should be addressed to Carl J. Weber.

Colby Library Quarterly

Series II

May 1947

Number 2

JOHN BROWN'S LETTER

By BOYD B. STUTLER *

ON the afternoon of November 19, 1859, John Brown sat in a cell in the jail at Charles Town, a condemned prisoner and under sentence to death by hanging. He read again a letter from his cousin, the Reverend Luther Humphrey, a Connecticut-born missionary who had worn himself out with forty years of carrying the Word to the remote settlements of the Western Reserve and of upper Michigan, but who had now settled down to a quiet pastorate at Windham, Portage County, Ohio. It was a letter that warmed Brown's heart. In it there was not a word of reproach, not a word of reproof. This letter called for a reply. The screed that came from the condemned man's pen that afternoon deservedly ranks as one of the finest prison letters ever written. That is perhaps why it has risen, like John Brown's soul, to go marching on through the years to plague and torment librarians and collectors four-score and more years after that November afternoon. It has had a way, like some fabulous creature, of reproducing and multiplying itself and in its several reincarnations has managed to cover the country from coast to coast.

With the full knowledge that at least a half dozen "originals" of this letter were held by libraries and individuals, students of the John Brown theme lifted their eyebrows

* Managing Editor of *The American Legion Magazine*. His collection of John Browniana is the only sizeable one left in private hands. The Oswald Garrison Villard collection has been recently transferred to the Columbia University Library.

18 Colby Library Quarterly

somewhat quizzically when the *Colby Library Quarterly* announced in its June 1946 number that, through the generosity of Mrs. B. K. Emerson, of Amherst, Massachusetts, the "original" letter written by the Harper's Ferry raider to his reverend cousin had been presented to the Colby College Library. It had come into the possession of Mrs. Emerson with the effects of a former President of Amherst College and the belief that it was the veritable sheet that came from the hand of John Brown was heightened by the Humphrey association with Amherst. Dr. Heman Humphrey, elder brother of Luther, had served the college as its President for nearly a quarter of a century, but was in retirement at the time of the Harper's Ferry *putsch*. He, too, wrote his condemned cousin under date of November 20, but in an entirely different tenor and in sharp contrast with the views of his brother. His letter was deemed Pharisaical and its content stung the old Kansas and Harper's Ferry warrior to the quick—he wrote his sisters that Dr. Heman "had just sent a most doleful lamentation over my infatuation and madness." The two letters have been often confused, but for no good reason because of their wide variance of thought and theme.¹

When the Colby accession was announced, an interested curiosity in the subject induced me to peep behind the curtain. A casual leafing through my John Brown scrapbook disclosed that, in addition to the Colby specimen, the "original" letter had been reported in recent years from St. Louis, Missouri (undated clipping, about 1900), as owned by a Mrs. Rawlings, then an employee of the Treasury Department at Washington; from Tabor, Iowa, in 1914, as "found among the papers of T. H. Read"; from

¹ A number of letters addressed to Brown were deemed improper and were not delivered. A collection of these is filed with the John Brown papers in the Virginia State Library, Richmond. The letter from the Rev. Luther Humphrey is printed in James Redpath's *Echoes of Harper's Ferry* (Boston, 1860), pp. 431-432. Dr. Heman Humphrey's letter and John Brown's reply are printed in Frank B. Sanborn's *Life and Letters of John Brown* (Boston, 1885), pp. 602-605.

Wichita, Kansas, in 1927, as "found among the papers of the late Theodore Morrison, librarian of the Wichita Municipal University"; in 1932, "printed through the courtesy of Mrs. Jane Lane Keeley, Riverdale, Maryland, who has the original in her possession"; and an undated clipping about the "original letter at the museum of the Winsted (Connecticut) Historical Society." In addition, there in cold print in Oswald Garrison Villard's monumental *John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After* (Boston, 1910), unchallenged for more than thirty-five years was a quotation from the letter to Reverend Humphrey (page 543) and accreditation of ownership of the original (page 651) to the Messrs. Daniel R. and William G. Taylor, of Cleveland, Ohio.

Certainly all the stories of the upcroppings could not be garnered by one scrapbook compiler, and it is not doubted that many other "originals" are still carefully filed away in public and private collections. That this surmise is true has been amply proved by the number of copies uncovered since the *Colby Library Quarterly* was distributed in the mid-summer of 1946. The returns, it is feared, are not all in.

Obviously there can be only one "original" among so many claimants, and at the outset of this investigation it seemed just as obvious that six of the seven letters on the original list—perhaps all seven—were some sort of pen forgery or lithographed facsimile of the letter, just as phony as are the two lithographed copies in my own cabinet of John Brown autographic material. One of these copies came to me from the distinguished collection of the late Emanuel Hertz, internationally recognized authority on Abraham Lincoln, who had not been deceived by appearances and who had passed the specimen on to me for just what it is.

When the list of claimants was called to the attention of the Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Colby College Library, it cast an implied doubt upon the authenticity of the copy placed in his keeping, even though its

provenance seemed unassailable. His professional as well as his personal interest was aroused: if the Amherst-Colby copy failed to prove itself, then he wanted to know where the original was held. This desire was not only for the purpose of establishing the status of an important historical document, but for the protection of librarians in general who had no guide in the matter and had no warning that the letter had been duplicated. With the encouragement of Dr. Weber I undertook the assignment to ferret out the facts and to report on the legitimate and illegitimate offsprings of John Brown's letter.

Now, after ten months of research and investigation, after an exchange of more than two hundred letters, and after some several hundred miles of travel (which included location and critical inspection of some dozens of specimens scattered all the way from New York to San Francisco), I am ready to report that the original has been located, has been personally examined and tested true by every standard of measurement short of laboratory analysis.

And I must report that it is *not* the Colby College Library copy. That specimen failed to rate Grade A in a simple test applied by Miss Mary A. Benjamin, Director of Walter R. Benjamin Autographs, New York, made in the presence of Dr. Weber. Further, it was tested by comparison and found to be a twin of admitted lithographed facsimiles from the files of The New York Public Library and from my own collection.

The genuine letter was, however, included in the list of the seven original claimants. It is the Taylor copy, which was examined and authenticated in 1908 by Miss Katherine Mayo while doing field research work for Mr. Villard's *John Brown*, but the evidence establishing it as the true letter did not come into my hands until after a good part of the whole country had been canvassed. Now, most appropriately, the authentic "original" rests in the treasure chest of Storer College Library at Harper's Ferry and is, it

is fervently hoped, forever removed from sale, trade or exchange. Its permanent abiding place on the college campus is just a few hundred feet distant from the old red brick Engine House in which John Brown made his last stand on the morning of October 18, 1859, and from which the Marines under Colonel Robert E. Lee carried him out, cut, thrust and bleeding from a half dozen wounds. One month later he sat in the Charles Town jail, eight miles from the scene of his raid, and wrote this famous letter to his cousin.

Now that it has been definitely established that the original letter does exist and that it is held safely and securely, though somewhat damaged from the hazard of shipping and handling, by one of the oldest educational institutions for Negroes in the country, the matter of the dozens of duplicates remains to be disposed of. We know, after exhaustive research, who caused the lithographed facsimiles to be issued, the purpose for which they were made, and to some extent the scope of the initial distribution. But we do not know where the stone was etched, by what lithographer, the number of issues or the number of copies issued. Perhaps all this will be made clear by later research. But enough is known and sufficient facts established by indisputable evidence from the various states in which the lithographed copies are found to say positively that there were at least three separate issues. Details of all this will be given later.

LUTHER HUMPHREY AND HIS LETTER

Luther Humphrey, second son of Solomon and Hannah Brown Humphrey, was born at West Simsbury (now Canton), Connecticut, on October 7, 1783; graduated from Middlebury College in 1813 and in 1815 began his work as a missionary to the Western Reserve. Though seventeen years the senior, he came to know his cousin, John Brown, in his youth through frequent visits to the home of his uncle, Owen Brown, at Hudson, Ohio. As a matter of fact there was a double tie of blood between the Brown

and Humphrey families through Owen Brown's first wife, the mother of John, but this is not the place to attempt to straighten out the tangled kinship of John Brown. That, if carried out to the last link, would lead to the White House twice through the persons of Ulysses S. Grant, whose father was an inmate of the crowded Owen Brown home while learning to be a tanner, and Grover Cleveland, also of transplanted New England stock. Rev. Luther Humphrey died at his home at Windham on May 16, 1871, at the ripe old age of 87 years.²

Though it cannot be questioned that Luther Humphrey prized the letter from his raider cousin, he did not rush it into print. It was in fact late in getting into circulation and into the growing body of John Brown literature. But once released it made up for lost time, and very quickly became one of the best known and most often quoted of all the hundred or more John Brown prison letters.

It was not until December 2, 1863, the fourth anniversary of the hanging, that it made its initial appearance in print in the *Cleveland Herald*, accompanied by some explanatory and commendatory text by the editor.³ The *New York Tribune* reprinted it on December 12, 1863, and from these two sources the letter was picked up and reprinted in dozens of newspapers all over the country. The first inclusion in a book between hard covers seems to have been in Horace Greeley's *American Conflict* (Hartford, 1864, Volume I, page 297).

The reprinting of the letter has since run in a pattern of well-defined cycles, and it still finds an occasional place in newspapers and magazines as well as in quotations from it in books. The first cycle ran through 1863 and 1864, the second starting about 1870. On August 29, 1873, the *New*

² Sketch of the life and works of Luther Humphrey in *The Humphrey Family in America* by Frederick Humphrey (New York, 1883), p. 399.

³ Letter of Florence M. Gifford, Reference Division, Cleveland Public Library, October 15, 1946. Photostat furnished by the library.

York Tribune again printed the letter in its news columns with the legend "never before published," and dignified it with mention in the editorial column. "The letter of John Brown of Osawatomie, which we publish today, is a remarkable document," says the editorial. "Though he writes under the very shadow of the gallows, there is little excitement and no despair in his words. Hawthorne once said that he deserved to be hanged for making an atrocious miscalculation of probabilities, but it cannot be denied that however he may have failed as an organizer of a campaign, there are few men who ever lived who understood better how to die."

Another cycle ran its course in late 1897 and through the Spanish-American War period in the following year. This one had its start in the *New York World* in December, 1897, when a local reporter at New Hartford, Connecticut, "discovered" the letter and added a bit of color of his own imagining, or inadvertently through ignorance or misunderstanding. "Rev. Luther Humphrey, a cousin of the famous abolitionist John Brown, died here recently," said the reporter. "Among his effects has been found a letter written by John Brown during his incarceration at Charles Town, Virginia, after his raid on Harper's Ferry. It is claimed that it has never been published before."

Picked up for reprint by the *Morning Star* (Boston), on December 30, the letter again started the rounds of the press. And it was this published report, relying altogether too much on the printed word, that started this investigator off on the wrong foot in the New England area. Also it might be said that the locale from which the story originated, Litchfield County which had mothered both John Brown and Harriet Beecher Stowe, lent considerable credence to the claims of both the Winchester Historical Society copy at Winsted, and to the Amherst-Colby copy. Winsted is only a few miles from New Hartford, in the same county, and the Humphrey association with Amherst has already been noted.

A closer examination of the newspaper story brought realization that there was something very fishy about it. Had Luther Humphrey lived until 1897 he would have been 114 years old, a truly patriarchal age. A little digging into the family records revealed that, at the date the *World* reporter scored his beat, the old missionary had been resting quietly in his grave at Windham for more than a quarter of a century. The reporter had unquestionably found one of the lithographed facsimiles which could have been, and probably were, very common in that part of Connecticut at that time.

The last cycle of reprintings started in 1927 when on January 20 the *Wichita (Kansas) Beacon*, in a full-page feature by Bliss Iseley and a column-long editorial by Elmer Petersen, announced the discovery of another "original" among the papers of the late Theodore Morrison, librarian of the Wichita Municipal University. This copy was found in an envelope addressed to Mr. Morrison's father, Dr. N. J. Morrison, Olivet, Michigan, postmarked Brooklyn, New York, March 2, 1864. Dr. Morrison was well known as an abolitionist and had had Ohio connections as a student at Oberlin College in 1845-1857 (Owen Brown served a dozen years as a trustee of this institution in its earlier days), and later as Professor of Philosophy at Marietta College.⁴ At the time of the postmark date he was President of Olivet College, which he had helped to reorganize in 1859. The envelope and its single content was carried with him when he went to Wichita in 1895 to develop Fairmount Academy into what is now Wichita University.

The *New York Times* of February 6, 1927, ran a "feature" story about the discovery of the letter, which it said was "hitherto unpublished, it is believed." This statement seemed to call for some correction, and on February 13 the *Times* published my letter calling attention to at least a

⁴ Biographical sketch in *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago, 1942), p. 869.

dozen times the document had appeared in print. It must be acknowledged that at the time of the Wichita discovery I did not know of the lithographed facsimile, though I was fully aware of Mr. Villard's accreditation of ownership of the original to the Taylor brothers at Cleveland.

Through correspondence that followed with Miss Flora Clough, then head of the English Department of Wichita University, I was more than half convinced by circumstantial evidence (I had no opportunity to examine the document) that the original had been resting untouched for years in the Wichita files. But I was more than a little annoyed when one of my letters was given to a *Beacon* reporter for a follow-up story—and after twenty years this seems to be as good a place as any to correct a piece of irresponsible reporting.

"Brown Letter Very Valuable Says Authority," was the *Beacon's* triple-deck headline on February 18, 1927, followed by a garbled quotation from the letter which, evidently, was too restrained to make a good story. "A letter received by Miss Clough today from Boyd B. Stutler, of Charleston, W. Va., bears information that the letter is John Brown's best known letter and that it has been lost for many years. He says *it is worth thousands of dollars. . .*"

What I did write under date of February 15—and kept a carbon copy—was: "It is a great find; the letter not only has an historic interest but has a very great monetary value." No reference was made to the letter having been lost, but I did call attention to Mr. Villard's statement and suggested that there might be some confusion of the letter to the Reverend Luther Humphrey, dated November 19, 1859, and that to his brother, Dr. Heman Humphrey, written on November 25. In a later letter, dated March 14, 1927, when pressed for an estimate of its cash value, I leaned over to the conservative side and opined that if put up at auction "it should not bring less than \$200, and perhaps a great deal more."

26 Colby Library Quarterly

There the matter rested until after the Colby announcement. Then, on July 12, 1946, Downing P. O'Harra, the Wichita University librarian, wrote me that the John Brown letter was being kept safely in the strong box, and that no one there had any reason to doubt its validity. Further estimate of the complete confidence in the letter had been expressed by President H. W. Foght in a letter dated July 28, 1932, now in the files of the Kansas Historical Society:

"This letter is perhaps the greatest treasure in our somewhat limited historical archives today, and I am inclined to think that our department of history will much dislike to part with it. . . . I understand that in the past we have had several liberal money offers, but there has always been a feeling that it should not be permitted to pass out of the State of Kansas. The offers were from the east."⁵

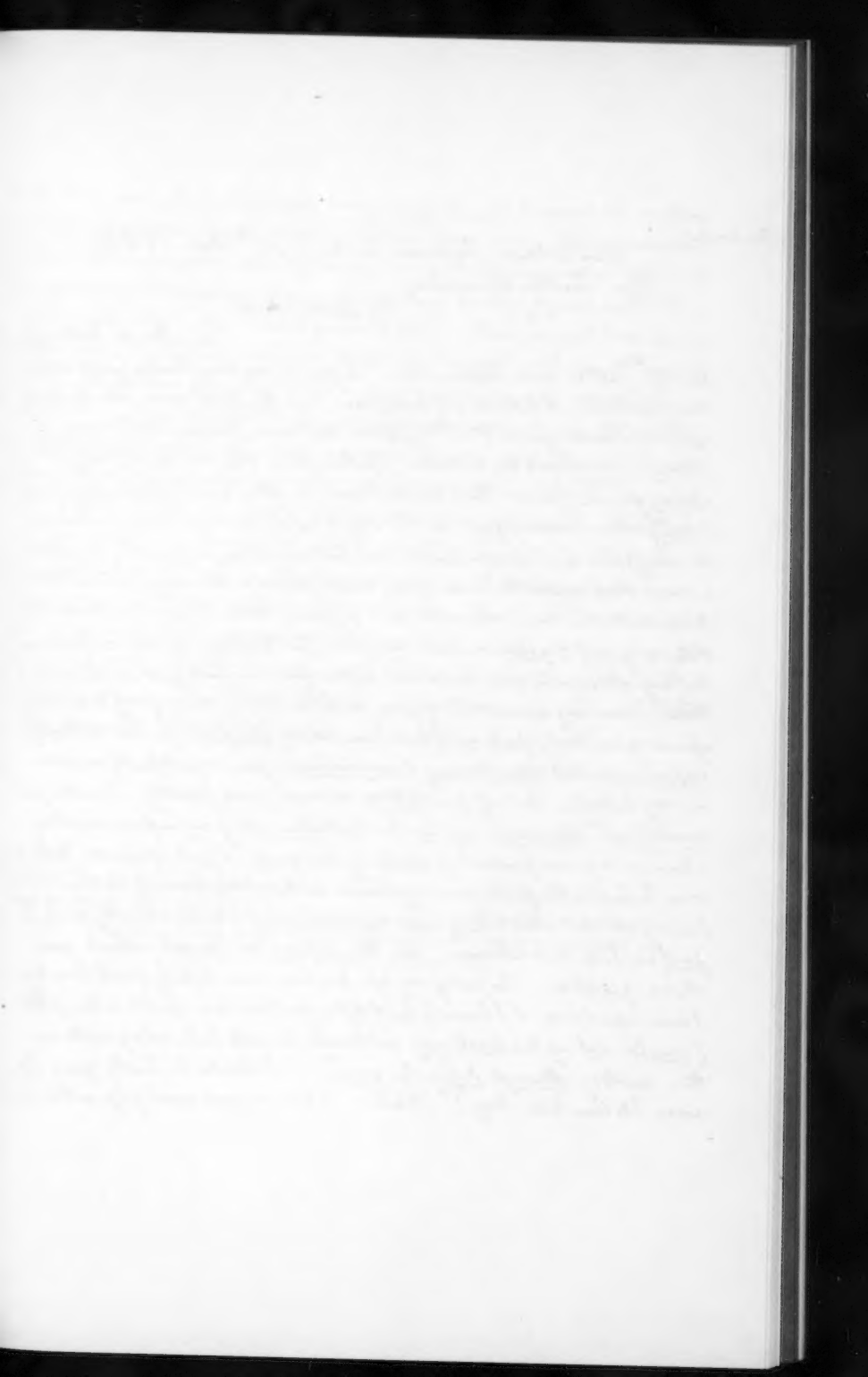
SLEUTHING FOR FACSIMILES

A few students of the John Brown subject had long been aware of the existence of a very clever lithographed facsimile reproduction of the letter of November 19, 1859, and that this reproduction had been in circulation since the early eighteen-eighties. It was good enough to pass unquestioned by the untrained eye of the average collector, and even good enough to fool experts. Therefore it seems passing strange that in sixty years only one note of warning had been sounded, and that one hardly definite enough to make complete identification of the particular letter.

In *The Collector* (New York, October, 1890), the late Walter R. Benjamin said:

Some collectors seem to be unable to detect the most transparent lithographic reproduction of letters. . . . Last month I had a John Brown sent to me. It was a reproduction of the famous letter from his prison. The sender thought it was genuine.

⁵ Letter of Lela Barnes, Treasurer of Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, July 20, 1946.



Facsimile

Charlottesville, Jefferson Co, Va, 13th Nov. 1859.
Rev Luther Humphreys

My dear friend

Your kind letter of

the 12th inst is now before me. So far as my knowledge goes as to our mutual kindred: I suppose I am the first since the landing of Peter Brown from the Mayflower that has either been sentenced to imprisonment; or to the Gallows. But my dear old friend; let not ^{that} fast alone grieve you. You cannot have forgotten how, & where our Good Father (John Brown) fell in 1776; & that he too, might have perished on the scaffold had circumstances been but very little different. He felt that a man dies under the hand of an executioner (or otherwise) has but little to do with his true character, as I suppose. John Rogers perished at the stake a great & good man as I suppose: but his being so, does not prove that any other man who has died in the same way, was good or otherwise. Whether I have any reason to be of good cheer (or not) in view of my end; I was afraid you that I feel so; & that I am totally blinded if I do not actually experience that strengthening; & consolation you so faithfully implore in my behalf. God of our Father: reward your fidelity. I neither feel mortified; degraded; nor in the least ashamed of my imprisonment, my shame, or my near prospect of death by hanging. I feel assured "that not one hair shall fall from my head without my heavenly Father". I also feel that I have long been endeavouring to hold exactly "such a fast as God has chosen". See the passage in Isaiah which you have quoted. No part of my life has been more happily spent; than that I have spent here; & I humbly trust that no part has been spent to better purpose. I would not say this heartily; but thanks be unto God who gives us the victory; through Infinite grace". I should be fifty years old were I to live till May, 2nd 1860. I have enjoyed much of life as it is: &

have been remarkably prosperous; having early learned to regard the welfare
& prosperity of others as my own. I have never since I can remember
required a great amount of sleep: so that I conclude that I have al-
ready enjoyed full on average number of waking hours with those
who reach their three score years & ten. I have ^{not} yet been driven
to the use of glasses; but can still see to read, & write quite comfort-
ably. But more than that I have generally enjoyed remarkably good
health. I might go on to recount unnumbered & unmentioned bless-
ings among which would ^{be} some very severe afflictions; & those the
most needed blessings of all. And now when I think how easily
I might be left to spoil all I have done, or suffered in the cause
of freedom. I hardly dare wish another voyage; if I even had
the opportunity. It is a long time since we met; but we shall now
soon come together in our "father's house", I trust. "Let us hold fast
but we already have", remembering that we shall reap in due time if
we plant not." Thanks be ever unto God, who giveth us the victory
through Jesus Christ our Lord". And now my old warmheart-
ed friend "Good bye".
Your Affectionate Cousin
John Brown

Reproduced from the lithographed facsimile now in the Brown Collection
of BOYD B. STUTLER. The copy in the Colby College Library lacks the
word "Fac-simile." The pages of the original letter are here reduced to
about one-half of their original size.

[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

M
b
e
e
h
d
a
b
a

a
to
th
fu
fr
th
q

fo
m
by
re
en
to
do
in

Ba
ph
ce
bu
wi
ow

H.
of
Lu

This warning was re-phrased by his daughter, Miss Mary A. Benjamin, in her recently published authoritative book, *Autographs* (New York, 1946), but, understandably enough, she interpreted the statement to refer to the equally well-known prophetic note which John Brown handed to one of the jail guards as he passed out of the door on his way to the gallows. Forgeries of this note have also been circulated, but among the informed there has been no question as to the whereabouts of the original for at least sixty years.⁶

So the search for the original prison letter started out on a cold trail with a list of seven "originals" (later increased to a full dozen) to investigate. No start could be made on the trail of the Mrs. Rawlings specimen because of lack of full name of the lady, and no information could be drawn from Mrs. Keeley of Riverdale, Maryland. That phase of the investigation was abandoned after three letters of inquiry remained unanswered.

The specimen reported from Tabor, Iowa, in 1914 as found among the papers of T. H. Read proved to be a copy made more than fifty years ago from an "original" owned by Guy Miller, of Chester, New York.⁷ Tracing down this reputed text proved to be the most interesting quest of the entire investigation, and perhaps the most disappointing to its present owner. Traced from Tabor through Shenandoah, Iowa, to Chester, New York, it brought to light the information that Guy Miller died a quarter of a century

⁶ "John Brown's Last Prophecy," five-line note handed to Hiram O'Bannon as he left the jail to go to the execution ground, given in compliance with a request for an autograph. "I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land: will never be purged away; but with Blood. I had as I now think: vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed; it might be done." The oblong note is owned by the Chicago Historical Society.

⁷ Letter of Elbert A. Read, Shenandoah, Iowa, October 7, 1946. T. H. Read's great-grandmother was a daughter of Captain John Brown of the Revolution; hence he was second cousin to John Brown and Luther Humphrey.

ago and that his effects had been distributed. Through a surviving daughter it was learned that the letter, one of her father's treasured possessions, had passed to Mr. Sherwood Strong and was now the property of his daughter, Mrs. Robert Stolz, of New York City. Thus, after an exchange of more than a dozen letters, the elusive Read copy was traced to a private home not more than a dozen blocks from the office in which this inquiry originated. Mrs. Stolz treasured the frayed quarto sheet, not only because it was one of her grandfather's prizes but for the further reason that it represented a considerable cash outlay by her father. Mr. Strong, when considering purchase some twenty years ago, had had the piece examined and appraised by an "expert" connected with a reputable New York auction house and, relying on the judgment and appraisal of the expert, laid down \$300 in cash money for the copy. After examination and comparison with my own facsimiles, I had to tell Mrs. Stolz that she owned a lithograph worth only a few dollars at current market value, but that nothing could take away the family association.

The Winchester Historical Society copy, held in their museum at Winsted, Connecticut, had a convincing provenance and some distinguishing marks, as described by Mr. Dudley L. Vaill, President, not found on other copies. But it lost ground when he said "the ink is extraordinarily black and clear, almost, I must say, too good to be true."⁸ Lithographic ink does not fade—and the ink that came from John Brown's bottle at Charles Town did pale down from a dark to a light snuff-brown.

Every piece investigated had its own circumstantial story to bolster its validity. The Mrs. Rawlings copy was "received by her son from the family of Mr. Humphrey immediately after the death of the old hero on the scaffold."

⁸ Letter of Dudley L. Vaill, President of Winchester Historical Society, Winsted, Conn., July 20, 1946. The Society acquired the copy as a gift from the daughter of Hon. John Boyd, a prominent abolitionist, whose home is occupied by the Winchester Historical Society. Mr. Boyd died about 1881.

"Grandpa" found another one on a battlefield during the Civil War; two or three were found in grandpa's old chest, and still another "came into the family from an old Civil War soldier" — old stories that are familiar to all collectors, librarians and dealers. Not one of the present owners knew of other copies or had reason to doubt that his own copy was anything but genuine.

A census of the holdings of all libraries seemed impractical, but a sampling was taken from institutional and public libraries known to have collections of John Brown manuscripts and documents. The New York Public Library's copy, accessioned as a reproduction, was a gift of J. Pierpont Morgan in 1900. The New York Historical Society, the Library of Congress, the Kansas Historical Society at Topeka, the Henry E. Huntington⁸ Library, San Marino, California, and Atlanta University Library,⁹ Atlanta, Georgia, all hold facsimiles catalogued as such. Other libraries reported holdings of typed or photostat copies.

It was not until this investigation was well under way that the first clue to the origin of the facsimiles was discovered in the John Brown scrapbook of the late Dr. Thomas Featherstonhaugh, held in the rare book room of the Library of Congress. It was contained in an undated clipping (c.1897) from the *Torrington (Connecticut) Register*, and this clipping led to the unfolding of all we now know about the reproduction. It read:

.... Judge (Gideon H.) Welch has received from Mr. Carl Stoeckel of Norfolk, son-in-law of the late Robbins Battell, the nucleus of a collection of John Brown relics, together with a descriptive letter. . . . The articles sent comprise a small oil painting of John Brown's grave made in 1864 for the late Mr. Battell. . . . Also a few facsimile copies of one of Brown's last letters written in jail to the Rev. Luther Hum-

⁸ Acquired by purchase in 1935; no record of dealer, according to letter of Wallace Van Jackson, Librarian, August 17, 1946. This copy is filed with Atlanta University's incomparable run of letters of John Brown to Seth Thompson, about 53 in all, dating from 1826 to 1849. The University has other important John Brown and related manuscript material.

phrey, a relative by marriage of Mrs. James Humphrey, a sister of the late Mr. Battell. Mr. Battell's brother, Joseph, had the letter in his possession for a short time and had it lithographed.

This clipping tells for whom it was made, but not when. Another positive record setting the date back some fifteen years was found in *The Humphreys Family in America* by Frederick Humphrey (Humphrey Print, New York, 1883), one of those king-size family genealogies sometimes described as just one size smaller than a butcher's block. In this book the facsimile was used as an illustration inserted between pages 310 and 311. That use definitely fixes the reproduction as early as 1883. At that it was probably the second issue. Judging from the history of the letter, Joseph Battell must have had the stone etched at least two years earlier than this appearance in the family history. The letter passed out of the hands of the Humphrey family in 1882.

The Battell brothers, Joseph and Robbins, must be at once relieved of any suspicion that, in issuing the facsimile, there was any intent on their part to deceive or defraud. Their purpose was to give wider circulation to what they believed to be the finest expression of the militant abolitionist who was a native of their own Litchfield County. That they were lightly connected with the Humphreys through the marriage of their sister, Urania, to James Humphrey, eldest son of Dr. Heman, probably had its influence on the letter's getting into the hands of Joseph. Their major error was in not adding a few letterpress lines of explanatory text — that would have made the piece readily identifiable. Had this been done, it would have saved several persons some embarrassment and others a considerable amount of money.

Robbins Battell, better known of the two brothers, was born at Norfolk, Connecticut, on April 9, 1819; graduated from Yale in 1839, and succeeded to the management of the very considerable family estate on the death of his father in 1842. He was a patron of the arts, a philanthro-

pist and Yale benefactor, and though he was anti-slavery in sentiment he was not actively identified with the abolition movement. His admiration for John Brown found expression in many ways — in 1864 he sent an artist to North Elba to do an oil painting¹⁰ of John Brown's grave, and about 1882 he commissioned Thomas Hovenden to paint "The Last Moments of John Brown." This noted canvas, which has a definite tie-in with the circulation of the facsimiles, is now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and, in the number of times it has been reproduced in newspapers, magazines, books and as separate prints, runs a close second to Leutze's celebrated "Washington Crossing the Delaware." It seems most significant that the active circulation of the Brown-to-Humphrey facsimile coincides with the first public exhibitions of the painting in the spring of 1884, at a time when the art magazines and newspapers from New York and Boston to Chicago were publishing glowing reviews of the painting and its subject.

Mr. Battell, full of years and of honors, died at his home at Norfolk on January 26, 1895, and a few months later his only daughter, Ellen, then a widow, became the wife of Carl Stoeckel, who succeeded to the family benefactions and whose name occurs frequently in the records in connection with distribution of the facsimile.¹¹ But Mr. Stoeckel, too, must be immediately absolved from any ulterior motive. His letters, particularly that to James W. Eldridge, Hartford, Connecticut, dated November 15, 1897, now held by the Henry E. Huntington Library,¹² and to the Kansas Historical Society, April, 1905, are crystal clear. Mr. Stoeckel writes that he is sending "a lithographed copy of one of John Brown's last letters writ-

¹⁰ Now in the Stutler John Brown collection.

¹¹ Biographical sketch in *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago, 1942), p. 1191. In 1900 Mr. Stoeckel purchased the John Brown birthplace and farm at Torrington, Conn., at a cost of \$10,000 and presented it to the John Brown Association.

¹² Letter of Norma Cuthbert, Department of Manuscripts, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, August 5, 1946.

32 Colby Library Quarterly

ten by him to the Rev. Luther Humphrey." Thus it is established that the original distribution by gift continued until as late as April, 1905.

Joseph Battell, who is credited by Stoeckel with direct responsibility for the creation of the facsimile, was through all his life associated with his brother in the management of the family estate at Norfolk and in New York. There is yet no inkling to serve to identify the lithographer he employed to do the job, but no doubt it was turned out from the plant of a New York concern.

THE ORIGINAL LOCATED

The Taylor copy was on the list of the seven original claimants and quite naturally came under investigation. Through the Cleveland Public Library it was learned that both William G. and Daniel R. Taylor were dead, but that a daughter of the former, Mrs. Gertrude F. Dautel, lived in that city.¹³ It was she who informed me that on the death of William, the last survivor, in May, 1943, the letter was sent to Storer College, Harper's Ferry, as a gift.

In the meantime an inquiry had been sent to Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard who had, in 1910, quoted from this copy in his *John Brown*. Mr. Villard, then at his New England summer home, wrote that, aware of the existence of the facsimile, he had tucked away with his voluminous notes some supporting evidence for his acceptance of the Taylor copy as the original, but it was not until late in September, 1946, that he was able to get to his files. There he found the clincher in a letter from Miss Ellen E. Taylor to her brother, William G., dated March 29, 1911, telling just how and when the historic paper came into her possession. Miss Taylor said:

Dear Brother: In response to your request for a written statement as to how John Brown's letter came into our possession these are the facts of the case. While visiting at Windham, O., somewhere about

¹³ Letter of Florence M. Gifford, Reference Division, Cleveland Public Library, July 25, 1946.

1882, I went to see the widow of the Rev. Luther Humphrey, having heard that she had some of John Brown's autographs. The letter which you have now was brought out. It was framed, and had evidently been so cherished that, of course, I could not ask for it, and no other autograph seemed to be in her possession. She must have seen my great desire to have it, for, presently, she said that as I was the only one of John Brown's relatives who had ever taken the trouble to enquire for his letters, and, as she was a very old woman who had but a short time longer to live, she would give the letter to me. She also said that her daughter, who was present, had been a missionary in a foreign land during the Civil War, thus was not so much interested in keeping the letter.

Mrs. Humphrey had been married twice, and I think had no children by Mr. Humphrey, at all events the daughter made no objections, but, after Mrs. Humphrey's death, a son sent word to me that he regretted his mother's action, and would like to have the letter back. On the ground of our relationship to John Brown I declined to give it up.¹⁴

Fortunately, Miss Taylor is still living and is able to verify the facts set out in her letter to her brother written thirty-five years ago. The provenance of the Taylor copy, involving only two families in the chain of ownership, seemed unshakable, but a critical examination of the document was indicated in order to establish its authenticity beyond question. There are many contemporary pen copies and even forgeries of John Brown papers floating around, and the possibility that this was a pen copy made at some time to replace the original was to be considered.

So the trail led to Harper's Ferry. Two trips to that picturesque town at the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah were necessary to complete the full examination and verification. At the time of the first visit, made in October, the letter was not available—it had been stored away too safely by the old librarian and the new one had no knowledge of the hiding place. However, a photostat copy was on display in the main reading room.

From Henry T. McDonald, President-Emeritus, it was learned that the letter had been shipped in its frame, in-

¹⁴ The Taylors are cousins of John Brown through the Mills line. Letter of Mrs. Gertrude F. Dautel, Cleveland, Ohio, October 6, 1946.

34 Colby Library Quarterly

securely packed; that the glass had been shattered and that the letter had suffered considerable damage. Neatly repaired by Mrs. McDonald and restored to its original state insofar as was possible, the letter was then turned over to the library to become a part of its considerable collection of autographic material relating to slavery and the abolition movement—a fit companion-piece for their Frederick Douglass manuscripts. However, the paper was not lost for long. A search of the files brought it out of its hiding place, but it was not until December that the second trip could be arranged.

Then, under the watchful eyes of President-Emeritus McDonald and Dean Leroy D. Johnson, the letter was laid out for inspection. Written on both sides of a faintly ruled, faded pale blue quarto sheet of laid writing paper, the letter passed every test that could be applied without elaborate equipment. The ink has faded to a snuff-brown, a characteristic of the prison letters which, it would seem, were all written with the same inferior grade of ink, and possibly from the same bottle. This snuff-brown sharply contrasts with the deep black of the facsimiles which, apparently, does not fade even when exposed to the light for a number of years. The test was conclusive—it is my firm belief that the Taylor-Storer copy is the true and genuine script written by John Brown in the Charles Town jail on November 19, 1859, to the Reverend Luther Humphrey.

Further, the critical inspection disclosed that the lithographed specimens are in every particular true to the original down to the smallest detail. The lines are of the same length; word length and height of letters agree with remarkable fidelity. The little character that appears under the underscored word *blinded*, fourteenth line, first page, is present, though much clearer in the facsimiles than in the original. That this letter was reproduced with such fidelity is a tribute to the lithographer's art, for it must be remembered that the stone was etched before synthetic off-set processes came into general use.

It is also interesting to note that this letter has never been sold but has passed from one owner to another by gift. There is no record of its value in dollars and cents—like that of Brown's last letter, written to Lora Case, which was once listed by a New York dealer at \$2,500¹⁵—though reproductions have sold for as much as \$300 and perhaps for an even higher figure.

THE LITHOGRAPHED FACSIMILES

This present investigation should serve as a warning to librarians, collectors and autograph dealers that the Brown-to-Humphrey letter has been removed from trade channels and no longer exists as an item of commerce. But the facsimiles, it is not doubted, will continue to crop up from time to time and will not improbably acquire a considerable value in their own right. It has been pointed out above that there is no positive proof of the priority of any one of the three issues identified, but there is an abundance of indicated proof that fully warrants certain conclusions as to priority classification.

FIRST ISSUE: Probably issued 1880-1881; letter on first and second pages, three and four blank; quarto, white laid writing with faint wire and chain marks; no watermark; deep black ink. The word "facsimile" is found in the upper left hand corner. This identifying word has been removed by erasure, smudging with ink, or pinched out of most copies examined. When pinched out, the last two words on the first line of page 2, "the welfare," are destroyed. Joseph Battell had the original letter in his possession before it passed to the Taylor family in 1882, thus strengthening the belief that this issue, scarcest of the three identified, was the premier.

SECOND ISSUE: Issued in 1883 for insertion in *The Humphreys Family in America*; letter on both sides of single quarto sheet; woven writing or finished book, no water-

¹⁵ Bought by W. T. H. Howe, Cincinnati; it is now in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

mark. The word "facsimile" in upper right hand corner burnished out, but in all other respects similar to No. 1. The specimen owned by the New York Historical Society is probably of this issue.

THIRD ISSUE: Probably dating from 1884. Produced from the same stone as Numbers 1 and 2 with word "facsimile" omitted; quarto, white woven writing; deep black ink, unfaded; letter on first two pages, three and four blank. This edition was probably put out by Robbins Battell under inspiration of the glowing press notices and general popularity of Hovenden's "Last Moments of John Brown," then on a round of exhibits in New York, Philadelphia, Hartford and other cities. The remainder of this issue was distributed by Carl Stoeckel after Mr. Battell's death, as is proven by his letters transmitting copies to James W. Eldridge, Hartford, Connecticut (1897), letter now in Henry E. Huntington Library, and to the Kansas Historical Society (1905). The Colby College Library specimen is identified as belonging in this category.

The only variant — located but not personally examined and identified — that does not fall into one of the above classifications is that owned by the Winchester Historical Society, Winsted, Connecticut, one of the original seven. It is thus described by Dudley L. Vaill, President: "The paper is lightly lined and has in the upper left hand corner a very faint oval embossing of some kind, the design being quite indistinguishable. There is no word 'facsimile' or sign of erasure and the lines on the reverse side (at top) are complete."¹⁶ This copy may, or may not, be of an entirely separate issue, but more than likely it came from the third lot.

¹⁶ Letter of Dudley L. Vaill, President of Winchester Historical Society, Winsted, Conn., July 20, 1946.

COLBY LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

THIS ORGANIZATION was founded in April, 1935. Its object is to increase the resources of the Colby College Library by securing gifts and by providing funds for the purchase of books, manuscripts, and other material which the Library could not otherwise acquire.

MEMBERSHIP is open to anyone paying an annual subscription of five dollars or more (undergraduates pay fifty cents, and graduates of the college pay one dollar annually during the first five years out of college), or an equivalent gift of books (or other material) needed by the Library. Such books must be given specifically through the ASSOCIATES. The fiscal year of the ASSOCIATES runs from July 1 to June 30. Members are invited to renew their memberships without special reminder at any date after July 1. Naturally, if money comes in early in the year, it helps the purchasing committee to make its plans.

Members will receive copies of the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY and notification of the meetings of the society. The officers for 1946-1947 are:

President, Frederick A. Pottle, Yale University.

Vice-President, Wilbert L. Carr.

Secretary, Gilmore Warner, Librarian.

Treasurer, Norman D. Palmer.

Committee on Book Purchases: Luella F. Norwood (term expires in 1947), Walter N. Breckenridge (term expires in 1948), and (*ex officio*) the Vice-President and the Secretary.

Editor of the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY and chairman of the Committee on Exhibitions and Programs: Carl J. Weber.

This issue of the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY has been set up
and printed by The Anthoensen Press in Portland, Maine.

Series II

May 1947

No. 2
